

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

February 20, 2007

Those Present: Al DeVito - chair, Sharon Estrella, Richard Knabel, Skip Manter and Brian Athearn.

Guests: Bruce Stone, Town Accountant; Beth Toomey, Chief of Police; Jennifer Rand, Executive Secretary; Martina Mastromonaco, Tri-Town Ambulance Coordinator; John Powers, Board of Health Agent and members David Merry and Eric Lowe; Maria McFarland, Conservation Commission and Personnel Board; Norman Perry, Personnel Board.

This meeting was taped for airing on MVTV

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m.

During tonight's meeting the proposed FY '08 budgets of the Police Department, the Tri-Town Ambulance, the Board of Health, the Conservation Commission and the Personnel Board were reviewed with the FinCom. Department/Committee heads were informed that votes taken were preliminary due to the considerable increase in the total budget. Some line items may need further review for possible cuts.

Police Department Budget:

Line item #210, Police Department. FinCom member Skip Manter is a West Tisbury police officer and so recused himself from this discussion. Chief Toomey stated that the total increase for airport/non-airport staff is 1.9% and is based on step progressions and COLA. Bruce noted that the main change in the airport staff was due to a reassessment of the number of officers actually used at the airport. The airport has a contract with the town and the reimbursement amount in revenue directly offsets the salary compensation in expenses. In response to questions concerning the difference in revenue Bruce explained that the Community Policing State Grant received in FY06 included two years of revenue due to late payment and therefore will be half that amount going forward. Also, that fines and licenses vary from year to year and cannot be accurately predicted. Chief Toomey explained the various staffing categories: a special officer is available to work on a year round basis in times of emergency, for special events, etc.; a special summer officer works seasonally in emergencies, for special event, etc.; a part-time officer works year round on a part time basis. All regular officers are required to work on holidays and receive time and a half for that work. The increase in insurance is due to an increase in premiums and the fact that this line used to be part of the town hall budget but is now separated out. Vehicular insurance is approximately \$6-7k, accident insurance (worker's comp equivalent) is \$13k and liability insurance is \$9k.

Chief Toomey then reviewed her "Recruitment and Retention" goals. Extensive discussion takes place with potential employees to outline the pros and cons of living on an island which include issues surrounding housing, high cost of living and reliance on the SSA. Discussion continues with new employees as well as veteran officers to handle issues as they arise. The chief believes in the value for both the town and for her department of retaining trained personnel.

Richard questioned the chief on a multi-year maintenance plan and where the money would come from in the budget. The chief replied that most of the maintenance/repairs in her budget are for the vehicles and there is a line for that. She has been working with the Town Buildings Committee to address the roof and the basement. Money is already available for the roof. Chief Toomey pointed out that they regularly keep up with needed repairs and since that is done, the building is in very good shape. A motion was made and seconded to preliminarily accept line item #210. The motion passed 4-0.

Jennifer Rand

Jennifer revisited the committee to give an update on line item #193, Insurance. She reported that insurance expenses do not have to go to bid. She has revised her budget down due to shifting insurance costs from the town hall budget to the respective departments. A motion was made and seconded to preliminarily accept line item #193. The motion passed 5-0.

At this point in the meeting, member Skip Manter excused himself to attend another meeting.

Jen also revisited line item #192, Maintenance and Repairs. Jen met with the Town Buildings Committee to prioritize the most urgent repairs for the near future. Jen can take care of the furnace in the spring when the heat goes off and has money left from the \$75k warrant amount to cover this. She may also have enough to do some selective interior painting, tackling the worst areas first.

This leaves work on the exterior painting and the repair to windows and replacement of missing storm windows. Jen received a preliminary estimate, but will put it out to bid to have a more accurate picture of the cost. This gave rise to a discussion of how to deal with the state of disrepair of the town hall, the associated costs and best way to acquire funding – through Jens' budget or as a warrant article. All agreed that this is an issue that must be addressed by the town and that the building needs to be properly maintained no matter what its future use. Finally, it was decided to add money to the budget informing the voters that it has been a mistake of the past to let this problem grow, but that it will not be ongoing. A motion was made and seconded to add \$55k (total \$61k) to line item #5240, Repairs & Maintenance Services of the Town Hall Budget #192. The motion passed 4-0.

Tri-Town Ambulance Budget:

Line item #231, Tri-Town Ambulance. Al asked Martina to summarize the 20% increase in her budget noting that there has been a large increase each year in recent history. Martina responded that she is trying to keep the Tri-Town on a par with the other island towns. Staffing is the largest cost. Hours for the clerical assistant have been increased to address the increase in work, primarily billing. She explained that the volunteer base is declining, noting time pressures, especially in the summer when many volunteers have one or more jobs. Martina is trying to make sure there is coverage and this means having some paid personnel such as the nighttime medic.

Martina then explained the revenue formula. Since July 1, 2006, \$94k has been billed and as of last month \$22k has been received. 5% of income is paid to the company that does the billing and has to come out of the budget. The revenue is applied to next year's Tri-Town expenses. Money billed from 7-1-06 to 12-31-06 is divided amongst the three towns, originally meant to reduce taxes. The insurance companies are slow to pay and since there is little money in hand to reduce taxes the money will be used to defray the budget.

Sharon expressed her concern regarding the lack of participation of volunteers. She wondered if volunteers are less likely to respond if they know there is a paid EMT available. Martina said volunteer participation is an island-wide problem. She reiterated that that was why she needs to have paid personnel - to be sure someone would be available. In response to a question of having an entirely paid EMT unit Martina explained that a study had been done and that salaries alone would cost \$600k+. The island just doesn't have the call need to justify the expense nor the personnel to man such a program. There would have to be two EMTs on duty at all times. Discussion ended and a motion was made and seconded to preliminarily accept line item #231. The motion passed 4-0.

Board of Health Budget:

Line item #510, Board of Health. John Powers, Board of Health Agent, explained that the annual inspection salary is for his assistant. Otherwise, his budget is level-funded. Al asked how much of plumbing inspections went to the town and how the fees compare to other towns. John responded that the fees are about the same and that \$7.50 of each \$50 inspection goes to the town. A motion was made and seconded to preliminarily accept line item #510. The motion passed 4-0.

Line item #522, Health Services. John stated that this item has gone from \$50hr. to \$85hr. and is being subsidized by the MV Community Services auction. John would like to have an actual reimbursement for actual services. Right now, the hospital makes up the remainder of what the health services contractor receives. Health services include flu clinics, new baby wellness visits, home-based patients not covered by other agencies, etc. At present, one contract serves all six island towns as well as the Wampanoag tribe. A motion was made and seconded to preliminarily accept line item #522. The motion passed 4-0.

Line item #433, Local Drop Off Center. John outlined some of the pros and cons of having the LDO with regards to cost. After a brief discussion about the possibility and ramifications of closing the LDO, it was decided to postpone this discussion to next week when the Refuse District budget will be reviewed.

Conservation Commission Budget:

Line item #171, Conservation Commission. After a few questions were answered to clarify some minor points a motion was made and seconded to preliminarily approve line item #171. The motion passed 4-0.

Transfer Request

Bruce requested a transfer of \$7,550 from the Reserve Fund for Veteran Benefits to be paid to two veterans living in West Tisbury. The state-defined amount to be paid is \$900 a month to each. The state will eventually reimburse the town for 75% of this expense. After a brief discussion a motion was made and seconded to approve the transfer of \$7,550 from the Reserve Fund for Veteran Benefits. The motion passed 4-0.

After the vote discussion ensued regarding the amount remaining in the Reserve Fund and whether or not that amount should be increased. After the \$7,550 transfer just voted there will be approximately \$15k left in the Reserve Fund. There is concern that there be enough to handle potential emergencies through the remainder of the year. A motion was made and

seconded to have a warrant article for the April Town Meeting to increase the Reserve Fund by \$10,000. The motion passed 3-1.

Personnel Board Budget:

Line item #152, Personnel Board. 85% of the budget covers personnel with the remaining 15% going to office expenses. After a few clarifications a motion was made and seconded to preliminarily approve line item \$152. The motion passed. 4-0.

The final discussion of the evening centered on the COLA increase. Richard noted that the two main things driving the budget are the school and COLA – that salaries increase by 10% per year. He asked if step increases were automatic. Mr. Perry explained that there are no step increases after 7 years of employment. Step increases are not automatic, but rather, depend on performance. Department heads file a form with check marks and comments to support the checks. Department heads are evaluated by the Board of Selectmen if there is no department board. Bruce noted that in his four years no one has been denied a step increase, however, request for a 2-step increase has been denied. Mr. Perry added that if the level of expertise of a new hire exceeds step 1 then they are hired at step 2. When asked how the Personnel Board arrives at the COLA amount, Mr. Perry explained that they look at other towns for comparison as well as the CPI (Consumer Price Index). The CPI uses a first half year and second half year average. There was some confusion as to why this method results in a different average then if all twelve months were taken into account. There was no further discussion.

There being no other business, a motion for adjournment was made and seconded.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:57 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Nancy Rogers, Administrative Clerk